

A parent's guide to...

# construction play

This type of play should bring out the designer in both boys and girls, explains *Penny Tassoni*

There are a few types of play that children have been interested in for generations. One of these is construction play. You may not recognise this term, but the chances are that as a child you played with cubes of wood or rectangles of plastic with the name of Lego! While many parents in the past would have bought these toys just to entertain their child, today the benefits of construction play in all its forms are considered to be important in children's development.

## **FIVE THINGS PARENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CONSTRUCTION PLAY**

### **1. Lots of play opportunities**

Any toy or resource that allows children to build in some way can be seen as construction play. This includes cardboard boxes and wooden bricks as well as the more conventional interlocking bricks. At first, most children enjoy playing with an adult or by themselves, but as children develop, they may develop projects with other children. Having said this, too many 'architects' can fall out!

### **2. Learning about mathematics and science**

One of the reasons why construction play is so important for all children is that it helps them to understand the link between shape, space and size. By building with blocks, children start to be able to judge and compare size and shapes. Children's understanding of shape often becomes increasingly sophisticated and it is not unusual for children at five years old to be able to produce some very complex structures. In addition, building with blocks helps children to learn some early scientific concepts about cause and effect.

### **3. Early design and creativity**

It is easy to think of creativity and design as being about drawing and painting, but construction play can help develop children's

creativity and design skills as well. At first, children often build things without much thought or intention, but as they develop, they start to plan what they want to build and also choose materials and shapes accordingly. While some of the design choices that children make can appear bewildering to an adult, the great thing about children is that they are not bound by convention or practicality – a swimming pool in a farm building? Why not!

### **4. Hand-eye co-ordination**

Most construction play requires a level of hand-eye co-ordination and ability to manipulate objects, and is ideal for honing these skills. Being able to place a block carefully on top of another takes real skill in focusing and positioning, while being able to push two interlocking blocks together requires a level of strength within the hands.

### **5. Minding the gender gap**

Unfortunately, some construction toys are seen as 'boys' toys' by children themselves. If you have a daughter, you may find that at your early years setting, construction play is not one of the things that your child seems to choose. This is because from the age of three years, children often tend to choose play things according to an unwritten gender rule when they are with their peers. The good news is that



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